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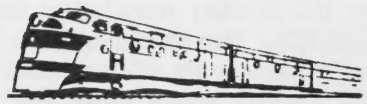
RAIL TRAVEL newsletter

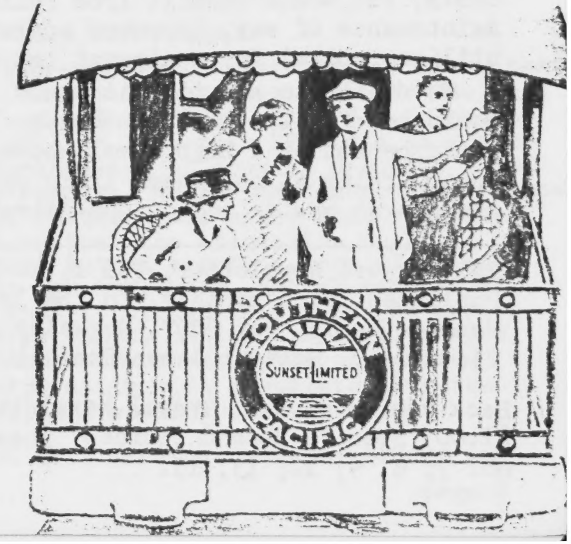


Vol. 1 No. 23
November 1, 1971

Amtrak

train no.1

SUNSET LIMITED



ON THE COVER: Heralding this special issue on the SUNSET LIMITED, the train chosen by Amtrak to bear its number 1 designation as of November 14, is a montage of symbols of the Sunset Route over the years. The photo, by Tom Dinger, shows the SP SUNSET on March 27, 1969, on a siding near Redlands, 7½ hours late on its run into Los Angeles. A freight derailment ahead was reportedly holding it there, and passengers were voluntarily leaving to take to a nearby highway, luggage in hand. The consist is typical of the off-season consist of this period, roughly the nadir of the train's life: baggage, automatic buffet car, and 3 coaches.

The drawing below is a portion of an ad, circa 1913, for the SUNSET LIMITED, when the train was perhaps at its most luxurious. The Amtrak symbol represents hope for the future of this important route.

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EDITORIAL

In the last issue we remarked that "Just as the Interstate Highways are Federally owned and maintained, so too should the roadbeds of the nation's railroads be owned and maintained to a high uniform standard." This prompted some queries from readers and requires some elaboration. The idea we are supporting is that of NARP's Anthony Haswell. It was summarized in the most recent issue of Passenger Train Journal as follows:

"I do think that government ownership of rights of way would be a great benefit to the railroads. Just the relief from local property taxes would improve railroad earnings earnings considerably. The Federal Government should assume this local tax burden. ... The railroads would pay operating costs, but would benefit from relief from taxes, interest, maintenance of way, improved operations, and the ability to utilize capital for equipment improvements."

We'd like to add that it would seem that this plan also would benefit the rail passenger, in that track standards could be set at a high level appropriate for running passenger trains at passenger train speeds uniformly throughout the Amtrak system and on non-Amtrak roads as well.

Rail Travel Newsletter, Vol 1, No 23, November 1, 1971. Published twice monthly, on the 1st and 3rd Mondays, by Message Media, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. $4 a year, 25¢ a copy. Editor: James Russell.

Back copies of Rail Travel Newsletter cost 25¢ each, 5 for $1.00. Specify second choices. These issues are sold out: no. 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15.

AMTRAK'S "OWN" SCHEDULE APPEARS

On Nov. 9 a baggage car on the northbd SOUTHERN CRESCENT, loaded with new Amtrak timetables, was due to leave Atlanta (where they were printed the day before--300,000 of them) and head north where a supply would be dropped off at each station enroute. For areas west of the Mississippi an air freight shipment would go out, and trucks would deliver the rest, hopefully to be in the hands of users by Nov. 14, at which time the schedules take effect. By the time you read this, the timetables should be available locally. (For readers in Canada and states not served by Amtrak, write to them at 955 L'Enfant Plaza S.W., Washington D.C. 20024.)

This 3rd Amtrak timetable has been called Amtrak's "own" schedule, since for the first time, with the exception of the initial route listings approved originally by the DOT, the details reflect Amtrak's own thoughtful work in attempting to upgrade and rearrange American train service to make it really useful and appealing to travelers.

The hand holding a copy of the schedule above belongs to a young lady shown in Amtrak newspaper ads in various cities the week of Nov. 8, announcing "some modest improvements in train service." For example in San Francisco/Oakland the following changes were publicized: 1) daily thru service to San Diego, formerly tri-weekly; 2) earlier Chicago arrival of the CITY OF S.F. for better connections; and 3) daily service to Los Angeles; "Regular dining car service, replacing automat cars." Condensed schedules were shown. The 7x10½ inch ads were well-placed in appropriate newspapers.

The schedule shows some last-minute train name changes which supersede those given in RTN #21. The FAST FLYING VIRGINIAN name is not used. The SUPER CHIEF/EL CAPITAN remains that. The SOUTH WIND becomes the FLORIDIAN. The 2 Seattle-Portland trains are named the PUGET SOUND and the MOUNT RAINIER.

DEBATE CONTINUES OVER AMTRAK'S MONEY NEEDS

Once again those concerned with rail service are finding that it is a time for writing Congressmen expressing their feelings about Amtrak's need for funds. The amount asked for is quite small--$170 million, $10 million less than SP alone is spending this year on new equipment--and it appears probable that Congress will support the request. Where the controversy arises is mainly in the matter of whether more money than requested ought to be allotted, and whether the allocation ought to be tied to the stipulation that Amtrak create a more efficient organization by hiring its own employees. Amtrak said it was starting to do just that when it signed this month an agreement with the Railway Clerks union, making clerical, office, tower, telegraph and station workers employees of Amtrak. In the near future the corporation will negotiate with the union regarding pay, hours, and working conditions.

. . .

On Nov. 4 Amtrak resumed rail service between Chicago and Quincy, Illinois.

East Coast Report by Steve Farrar

AMTRAK has bought 175 PC cars--4 baggage-buffet-parlor, 7 slumberccach, 7 sleeper-lounge, 3 lounge, 20 parlor, 6 parlor-lounge, 18 coach snack bar, 110 coach--no diners, no full slprs.

METROLINER PROBLEMS--Altho PC told the press only of "an incident involving an overheated motor," PC employees report that a GE motor fell off a Metroliner axle, once near Croyden, PA, and again near Trenton, all within a week. Speed was cut to 80 Oct. 15-17, went back to 100 Oct. 18, but was cut to 80 Oct. 19. A notice posted Nov. 3 at Washington Union Station stated that "today only" Nos. 101, 102, 103, 106, 109, 112, 113 & 116 would run 80mph, but that the 11 other Metroliners would do 100.

THE NATIONAL VISITOR CENTER will be built at Washington Union Station. B&O had the money for its part over a year ago, but PC didn't. After a Congressional threat to transfer the Center elsewhere, PC has decided to ante up. Besides the Amtrak station, the Center is to include a subway stop, Holiday Inn, parking deck and Greyhound-Trailways terminal.

SECOND HONEYMOON BY RAIL--a middle aged couple rode the SOUTHERN CRESCENT in Oct. from Lynchburg, VA, to New Orleans. One of 3 diesels caught fire near Salisbury, making no. 1 about 2 hrs late into Atlanta--yet only 15 mins late at New Orleans. Return included a stopover in Atlanta, where the hotel clerk was surprised to learn that passenger trains still served the city. Worse, when the couple was intent on catching the PIEDMONT, the cab driver had never heard of Peachtree Station and had to call his dispatcher. The PIEDMONT was held 1½ hrs at Salisbury--waiting for an office car on the Asheville train, which had hit a tractor-trailer. The travelers enjoyed the trip--especially the scenery and dining service. But they were irritated that the crews ignored the passengers completely--failing to announce major delays, failing to give that "extra service" that people appreciate.

ICC REPORT ON AMTRAK of Oct. 31 is about 3/4" thick and chock full of recommendations for Amtrak. ICC urges more money for NRPC, revisions in fares, and 30-day public notice before dropping a train not in the basic system. A 37-page appendix makes specific service-improvement suggestions, such as: Pasco-Portland service; changing days of operation to facilitate transferring between CITY OF S.F. and COAST STARLIGHT at Oakland; running CITY OF S.F. Ogden-Salt Lake-Wells to connect from RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR; arranging for RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR & DENVER ZEPHYR to connect in both directions; thru cars Oklahoma City-L.A. via Newton; operating the eastbound SUNSET LIMITED earlier and the northbound TEXAS CHIEF later to make possible a connection at Houston; reschedule EMPIRE BUILDER to make better connections in Chicago (done Nov.14); put the SOUTH WIND on a night-day-night run (done), scheduled so as to make possible Chicago-Atlanta and Louisville-New Orleans travel in connection with Southern (not done); adjust Georgia RR and SR schedules to make possible Augusta-New Orleans travel.

AUTO-TRAIN plans to use Union Pacific 5 DBR-2 CMPT-2 DR sleepers, but will call all accommodations "staterooms." SCL twin-unit diners will provide the buffet service, run by Marriott, Inc. ATSF steam generator cars will provide the heat, and new GE U36B's the power. Auto-Train will have hostesses instead of sleeper porters. All trains are sold out in Dec., and also some Jan. & Apr. dates. CN "Car-Port" cars are now trading their freight car trucks for hi-speed box-express trucks. Land is being cleared for the Lorton, VA terminal. Auto-Train will put a new brochure out shortly.

PC wants to drop its Providence-New London RDC commuter Nov. 21. .....A freight wrecked on SCL on Oct. 29; passengers were bused Auburndale-Miami while freight went via FEC.....Garden State Metropark opens Nov. 14, but temporarily will be used only by Amtrak and not commuters.....A SILVER METEOR Sun-Lounge is being given an interior redecorating by Amtrak, will feature luxurious red-and-black carpet.....Trailways has lost its right to operate charter buses between N.Y. & D.C. because it worked its drivers longer than the ICC limit; & Chicago & Southern Airlines has lost its rights because of crash of Chicago-Peoria flight (see RTN #22, p.13); both temporarily .....Metroliners will use their standard vestibule trap steps between N.Y. & New Haven, since there are no high platforms..... Efforts to save Queen City Station-Hotel, Cumberland, MD, failed, and the station is being razed (leaving only one station-hotel in U.S.--on Erie east of Binghamton.....Dept. of Interior has urged Amtrak to designate 10 routes as a National Scenic Railway System.....NARP's Oct.23 Baltimore-Hagerstown excursion lost money.....Chihuahua Pacific RR has bought IC domes .....CP closed its U.S. ticket offices, substituting an Enterprise phone number.....Rep. Harley Staggers has introduced a bill providing Amtrak with specific additional funds for equipment only.....Baggage car will reportedly be dropped from GEORGE WASHINGTON Nov. 14. Limited checked baggage (no trunks) will be handled at major points, and will be kept in a bedroom in the diner.....C&O sleepers fill in for UP cars on the GEORGE much of the time due to mechanical trouble on UP cars. Some feel that the C&O "Robert R. Young" sleepers are far superior in interior appointments--for example having very comfortable movable armchair instead of a fixed sofa.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"There must be limits to any federal subsidy, of course, but considering the many billions of dollars competing transportation systems have received in past years, Amtrak's immediate needs are relatively small.

"For in this age of growing concern for the quality of the lives we live and for the importance of the simple amenities of that existence, many Americans should be able to find true pleasure in riding passenger trains. But the service must be satisfactory, and that is going to require some time and some money.

"Amtrak is still building up a head of steam. Let's reserve judgment until we see if Mr. Lewis, with a boost from Congress, can get it on the right track."

--Oakland Tribune editorial, Nov. 8

"The image one receives of Amtrak ... is that of a rather low-key operation. Travel by railroad has to be hawked just as does the sale of Scotch whisky, car hire and air transportation. A generation has come upon the scene that knows little of train travel; these young people, especially, need to be convinced of what the railroads have to offer."

--Letter to N.Y. Times, Oct. 31

Mixed Train of Thoughts

AUTO-TRAIN'S former ZEPHYR cars are reportedly getting an exterior acid etching in purple, white and black... TIME MAGAZINE is behind the times. It refers to the present as "an age when rail passengers count themselves lucky if they can get stale sandwiches and warm soft drinks". (This in its Nov. 8 report on Auto-Train.) Either they haven't ridden a train since Amtrak or have only been in SP's ABC's... NOVEL IDEA on the LIRR: "commuter classrooms" on morning trains, run by Adelphi professors. Get an advanced degree in Bus. Ad. while you ride to work... COAST DAYLIGHT is getting 3 L&N diner-counter-lounge cars to replace the automats. They came into Oakland on the CITY OF S.F. Nov. 12. Our table last issue showed the cars due to go on the Chicago-New Orleans route...

DOME COACH, but no parlor car, will initially go on the COAST DAYLIGHT and will run thru Oakland-San Diego... SLUMBERCOACHES for the DZ and EMPIRE BUILDER will be SCL cars while the Florida trains and the SUPER CHIEF/EL CAP will have the NP/Burlington cars. The BROADWAY LTD will continue with PC slumbercoaches... ROUND-END observations will come off the SILVER METEOR (at least from the rear end) but they will be added to the CITY OF S.F. (SCL) and NORTH COAST HIAWATHA between Spokane and Chicago (Burlington ex-CZ dome observation sleeper)... HI-LEVEL cars will be on the EL CAP, TEXAS CHIEF, SUNSET LTD., and the SAN DIEGANS that provide connections with the SUPER CHIEF... ALL METROLINERS will be operating in 4-car consists starting Nov. 14. However, total capacity will be increased by about 35% during the morning and afternoon peak periods... COMPUTER RESERVATIONS have begun in Chicago and Union Station there now has an Amtrak ticket office building in the middle of the waiting room...

AMTRAK in Chicago has begun advertising West Coast and Florida vacation packages... RIO GRANDE agents in San Francisco had no word as of Nov. 12 whether their ZEPHYR schedule would change this month... AN AUDIT by Amtrak of PC, SCL, GM&O, and Santa Fe is underway to determine whether overcharges and inefficiencies occurred... RTN READER wrote to GM about that ad showing Chevrolets in Yosemite, vowing to end his lifelong reliance on their cars, and got a form letter "in doubletalk" back. Looks like they had lots of complaints... HIGH-SPEED ground transportation research program should be a permanent program, DOT and FRA are telling Congress... 15 MINUTES is being added to COAST DAYLIGHT schedule L.A-S.F. and 10 minutes S.F.-L.A.

KEEPING TRACK

...with Paul Rayton

(A reguler RTN feature. Each issue presents another review-critique of a selected pre-Amtrak train.)

SUNSET

Date: January 1, 1971

Promptly at one minute past noon the Conductor gave a wave and we started to inch out of New Orleans. Our overnight stay in bedroom E of sleeper SW-1 had been very restful and we were excited about this new leg of the trip.

Before we pulled out I had wandered up to look at the engines. There I beheld a strange, ungainly lashup of diverse motive power. If ever there was a sloppy-looking front end, this was it. Five units, each one a different model. "Oh well," I mused, "as long as it works, what do I care?"

I hadn't done my homework and was unprepared for the huge New Orleans Public Belt Railroad Bridge (also known as the Huey P. Long Bridge). I knew that somehow we would have to get to the other side of the mighty Mississippi. I expected a drawbridge of some sort. Riding along, a glance out the window revealed we were climbing a grade, so I went to the vestibule and opened the door (insuring first of all that the Porter wasn't looking). Stretching before me was over 4 miles of bridge (including approaches), an awesome sight as we worked our way up the gentle slope toward the 3524-ft bridge itself.

As we worked higher and higher on the grade, the view became better and better. Huge barges were tied in groups near the banks of the river like big bunches of floating bananas. We could gaze down (!) at nearby trees and see the Spanish Moss draped over everything. As we crossed the water, a barge floated directly beneath us, coerced upriver by a smoking tugboat.

Descending, a big turn in the grade afforded a chance to view the entire consist in one graceful arc. From the front car I could count the cars of our very sizable train: 4 sleepers (including an 11-bedroom car), a diner-lounge, 3 coaches, an (ugh) automatic buffet car, and then 6 more coaches. Wow! you would think, Wow! The SUNSET route really packs 'em in! Don't forget, though, that this was the close of the Christmas holiday season--and, thanks to tri-weekly service, there wouldn't be another westbound train for three more days...

Most of the cars were real SUNSET cars, a product of the 1950 re-equipping by SP. There were a few others, though: several "Daylight" coaches and some non-stainless steel-sided sleeping cars. The best car on the train, a sleeper with drawingrooms and compartments, was used for the dining car crew's sleeping quarters.

After absorbing some of the bayou country scenery, my wife and I headed for the dining car for our lunch.

The dining car interior was uniquely western, perhaps even ethnic. Known to rail buffs (after its decor) as a "Pride of Texas" diner, the walls were adorned with western ranching memorabilia. High on the walls were replicas of the famous Texas Longhorn steer. Beneath these imposing animals, the rest of the side and end walls were festooned with western spurs and a multitude of the symbols of the open ranges--the marks of branding irons: "Lazy-L" and "Running-N" and "3 Bar 3".

One crew member had brought a portable TV set and it sat in one corner, tuned to the Sugar Bowl game. We arranged our seats so as to see the game while eating but reception was spotty and our interest soon faded.

SP menus--the lot of them--were Spartan in appearance and steep in price. Luncheon prices ran over $3 for either a Chef's Combination Salad or a Hot Beef Sandwich, with potatoes and gravy. This "feast" incluided pie or sundae plus a beverage. (Did I say the choices were limited on the Southern Railway?!)

Previous experience told us that the Denver Sandwich (on toast) was the better buy, $1.95 a la carte. This is an omelet-type dish served as an open-face sandwich. Its distinguishing feature is the use of pineapple pieces around the top of the omelet. It is a good

lunch dish, quite light and served, in this instance, with tomato, olives, cottage cheese, pickles, and potato chips. The bag of chips bore the exhortation, "Enjoy life!" With a measly sandwich for lunch?

While eating we progressed across a vast, flat, treeless expanse of Louisiana swampland. Every now and then we would slow down, and just outside the windows we could see some tall, bulrush-like plants very close to the right-of-way. They were extraordinarily pretty, 10 or more feet tall, long stems topped by fluffy puffs, wind-carried seeds waiting for the right breeze to whisk them away into the bayou.

These scenic plants, probably wild sugar cane, were tantalizing. The train would slow down for some reason and the stalks would be right outside, weaving slightly in the wind. Just as I'd decide that now was the time to get up and take a picture, the train would speed up again, turning the tall puffs into a blur.

This fast-slow-fast routine went on for some time. Gradually our average speed dropped. At 2:30pm, somewhere between Franklin and New Iberia, La., we ground to a stop.

Steam and air hissed from under the cars, harsh sounds in the swamp's primeval quietude. Various creatures stared back at us from beneath leaves and behind trees, annoyed at our noisy interruption of their feral existence. From our foremost car, leaning out the side of the vestibule door, peering through a billowing cloud of steam, I could see our problem: a freight, "dead" on the tracks less than 100 yards in front of us.

It was never explained just why that freight sat up there, blocking the single track main line. Was he switching? or derailed? or hot boxed? As usual, railroad mysteries remained that way. We sat in our swampy spot for a good 30 minutes, exploring more thoroughly than ever the patch of jungle outside our window.

Eventually we started moving. When we made the station stop in New Iberia we were 45 minutes late--and just 126 miles from our point of origin. That freight obviously shouldn't have been sent out so closely preceding a passenger train.

The afternoon progressed. I noticed particularly the small towns we passed through. You would think that, after X number of small towns they would all start to look pretty much the same. Not so. The Louisiana bayou towns had their own distinctive air, even as towns in New England may be distinguished from the villages of upstate New York.

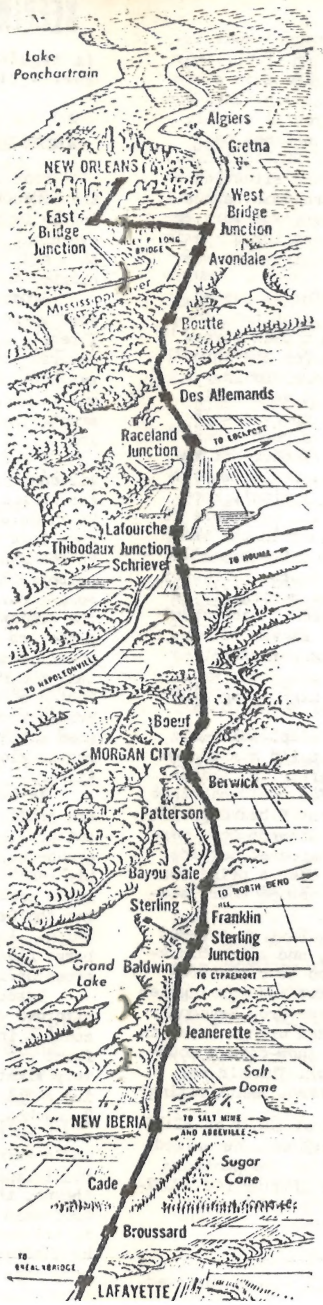
The similarities to the scenes in the EASY RIDER film were unnerving. Small children waved as we passed. In the almost impenetrable vegetation between spots of civilization, wild and commercial crops seemed to coexist. I was amazed by the height of the trees—and the great width of the swath cut through them for the railroad.

Southern Pacific Sunset Route

"The Exposition Line—1915"

The small luncheon had by now worn off and we were ready for dinner. Unfortunately, dinners on the SUNSET were similarly expensive, and only average in quality. The dining facilities were called the "Coffee Shop" by the SP menu. The idea was, according to one SP official, "to connote the idea of an economy place to eat, not an expensive dining car."

Commensurate with the disinterest SP lavished on their menus was the situation obtaining with the chinaware. It was a hodgepodge of styles, mostly stuff you might encounter in some neighborhood eatery. No frills or fancy stuff here. (But I shuddered to think of the poor souls who had ridden this train in the last five years with only the automat cars—paper plates et al for dining service.)



The food was acceptable, and the waiters surprisingly pleasant and helpful. The offerings were sparse: Fillet of Fish, lemon butter, $3.60; Roast Turkey, celery stuffing, giblet gravy, $3.90; or Salisbury Steak, mushroom gravy, $4.15. You had no choice of the vegetable or potato—you liked what they served or else. Included also were cold, tasteless dinner rolls, dessert, and beverage.

A cup of soup on the side was 60¢, and a lettuce and tomato salad with blah French dressing was priced at $1.25. We bought one for the two of us to split, at that price. For the ultra well-heeled, there was a "Special" Broiled Sirloin Steak dinner—for $7.00. The air up there was a bit too rarefied for us, knowing what we did of the service. Thus was coffee shop "economy."

Interestingly enough in this heaven of high prices, there at least was wine available with the meals. And not just any wine, either. The Southern Pacific offered a private-label wine, with their name on it! Could this be true? The Southern Pacific? Three wines (red, rosé, and white) were carried, at $1.25 for a half bottle. A fair price, and a decent wine. At least it made the food taste better. I had the red, along with the Salisbury Steak. At least they gave the meat enough gravy.

By this time we were well into the state of Texas. A color-bright sunset had made afternoon much more interesting. If only we'd had a dome car. But that would have required an act of God!

We were due into Houston at 8:25pm. We got in at 9:20. Somehow we had lost more time. The timetable allowed 25 mins for the stop in Houston, so we were there 30, just on matter of principles.

SOUTHERN PACIFIC SERVICE
is THE standard

"SUNSET LIMITED"

Every Day No Extra Fare
Solid Pullman Train

New Orleans Los Angeles San Francisco

As we prepared for bed, about 11:00, Peggy remarked about how cold it was getting. I checked our steam valve: "on." As I began to wash up, the grim truth came out: no steam. Ergo, no hot water—and no heat. We put on all our blankets and braced ourselves for a cold night.

The next morning the steam was back. They might have fixed it in San Antonio, for, when I figured out where we were, I realized that we were now 1½ hours late. "Keep losing!" I secretly urged—and we'll get to see the Salton Sea when we arrive in California.

We arose early because breakfast on the SUNSET was the only meal in which you got your money's worth—and we didn't want to miss that.

Breakfast prices ranged from $2.10 to $2.60, and included the standard items—bacon, sausage, or ham and eggs; plus a fruit, juice or cereal; toast; and beverage. This was the only meal at which were offered staples such as fresh fruits or real eggs without disguising them as another dish and/or charging a premium price.

The day then wore on and on. There were infrequent towns along this desolate plains route. It was difficult to notice the subtle transitions in the landscape, but now and then we would to thru some hilly, rocky terrain. After a spell, you tire of the red/brown earth colors and look for structures on the horizon. The only newspapers to read were those brought aboard by arriving passengers. Lunchtime was a welcome break in the monotony. The menu was the same as that of the previous noon.

We remarked to each other about the smooth ride of the train. I would grade it an "A-". I wondered what had been done to make it so smooth. One time, when it appeared that we were really high-balling on fast track I got out my stopwatch and clocked our speed from the mileposts: 70mph! I guess my judgment had been thrown off by so many miles of the SUNSET's usual 55 or 60mph rate that by comparison 70 felt pretty speedy. If the train had been traveling at the higher speeds reached on other roads, undoubtedly the roadbed would have felt rougher than the A- rating assigned above.

We passed bales and bales of raw cotton, stacked neatly in nearby fields. The agricultural empires built on these farms contributed their share to the current wealth of the SP.

As we neared El Paso, the sky began to assume an orangish coloration. It was only about 2:30pm, so it couldn't be the sun setting. El Paso, a large city (320,000), must have one heck of an air pollution problem, I reasoned. And the smog extended way out here, some twenty miles from town.

By the time we reached the outskirts of town, the air was thick with a brownish-yellow cast. I gave an offending smokestack an incriminating stare. But something was wrong—it didn't smell like smog.

When we pulled into the El Paso station, by now two hours late, it was clear that something was wrong in El Paso. It wasn't smog, it turned out, but a horrible, choking dust storm that had enveloped the whole city.

Cars in the streets had their headlights on. The sun was an immense reddish obelisk mysteriously held up above, almost obliterated by the dust in the air. Everything was blowing—tumbleweed, dust, papers, hats, hair. Life was simply impossible under those conditions.

Southern Pacific

Some respite was found behind the doors of the sleeping cars. For some incomprehensible reason, many coaches remained with doors open for the entire time we were in the station--with a resultant immense accumulation of dust in all the passageways. I felt sorry for those coach passengers. They would have no opportunity to clean up until Los Angeles. If the doors had been shut they'd have fared much better.

It turned out that again the time allocated (30 mins) for this station stop was hardly enough. We had to add two sleepers to the head end, pull off an SP business car that had ridden at the end for several stops, and add 4 or 5 more coaches to the rear, plus contend with the elements, the heavy patronage, and other intangibles. The result was an El Paso stop of over an hour.

In El Paso, with the additional cars, we gained at least 100 more passengers. Fully 95% of those entraining passengers were Mexicans, coming into the U.S. (and onto the SUNSET) via the last remaining reasonably direct rail connection from Mexico. Their tenacity had to be admired, what with the necessity of changing countries and stations at this point.

Defying the dust, I went out armed with a wet Pullman hand towel on a broom handle and gave our bedroom window a quick wash. Even with the inhospitable winds the improvement was well worth the effort.

When we finally pulled out of the dust storm hell-hole we were 2 hrs 35 mins late.

On the upgrade out of the Rio Grande River Valley, west of El Paso, we gradually climbed out of the dry, dusty inferno. Not without incident, though--we had to stop and creep past another freight that had been sent out in front of us again. Lose 15 more minutes. It was like a losing game of Monopoly--only you lost minutes, not play money.

Rock Ballasted Road Bed, Oil Burning Locomotives, Automatic Electric Block Signals; safety, comfort and speed.

Luxuriously appointed Library, Observation, Standard Sleepers with Compartments and Drawing Rooms and Through Dining Car.

We were treated to another stunning sunset that afternoon. It must have been related to the wind and dust of the storm earlier. Magnificent clouds and rich color tones made it memorable. If the sun goes down in flaming glory like this every day, the train's name is most appropriate.

At dinner time (the dining car had weathered the dust storm quite well and was clean) we had a new menu, this time offering Fillet of Sole, lemon butter for $3.60, or Pot Roast of Beef, mushroom sauce ($4.15) or Fried Half Chicken, au sec ($4.10). The usual non-selection of other courses prevailed. But more wine helped our cause.

The dining car was very crowded for dinner. We waited until late when the multitude had dispersed.

The menu offerings made absolutely no acknowledgment of the overwhelmingly Latin cast of the passenger load. Even fundamental dishes like tacos or simple refried beans were not available. With beans as much a staple to Mexicans as bread is to Americans, it seemed to me that the dining car menu was not very carefully thought out. They were missing a good share of their potential market. Or ignoring it.

The dining car closed up about 9:00pm. Fifteen minutes later, in our room, I felt the need of a spot of hot tea. The waiters, now lounging around the tables in the diner, told me that they couldn't serve any more that night and they had thrown out all the hot water. I returned to our room and broke out my "emergency pack" of spare tea bags. Uh oh! No hot water in our room. I thought it was trouble just in our car.

I checked every other sleeping car--and several coaches. No hot water anywhere. And no heat, either, for that matter. It was getting colder outside (and inside) and we were without steam again. (I often wonder what exactly firemen do up front. They certainly don't send much steam back; not here, anyway. This was the third time, you'll recall, that we had been without heat since we departed Philadelphia.)

I reported the situation to the Steward, a trainman, and a Conductor, but none was very encouraging about getting a repair job. An air of resignation was prevalent.

It was raining in Tucson, Arizona. I hoped that the people waiting hadn't been forced to stand outside for the three hours since we were due in.

We both slept very well that night. Slow speed equals smooth ride equals good sleep. When I got up, I looked out the window and saw... could it be?! The Salton Sea! I didn't know how we had done it, but there it was, blue and clear in the crisp winter air. What a fresh smell, leaning out the doors. Everybody was excited about seeing it. We should have passed it back about 2:00am, but here it was 7:30am, and there was the unmistakable body of water. Deduction: we must have had a night-long slow order.

Yes, I had slept well--so well in fact that I'd missed the emergency stop after the train-car collision. Yes, we'd had that too. When at first I heard people discussing it I thought they were joking. It had happened outside Phoenix and had been a prime contributor to our now 5½ hour lateness.

During breakfast we crossed the Palm Desert, and after breakfast were treated to a picture-book entrance into the Los Angeles basin. Coming down from Beaumont hill we had loaded orange trees in the foreground, snow-capped mountains in the back. The air was clear and smog-free. Exhilirating!

We arrived at LAUPT at 12:15 pm (due in at 6:30am). We waited 5 minutes there on the platform and watched the CITY OF LOS ANGELES pull out. By comparison it looked pretty fine...

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TRAIN NO. 1

Amtrak has chosen the train running between New Orleans and Los Angeles on Southern Pacific rails to carry its designation as trains 1 and 2 of the nationwide system. The decision becomes effective November 14 with the publication of Amtrak's third nationwide timetable. The train name, SUNSET LIMITED, restores the original name given the train when it began operation Nov. 1, 1894, almost exactly 77 years ago. The "Limited" portion of the name was dropped Dec. 16, 1958, in the era when SP began its campaign to eliminate passenger trains.

The number 1 assignment came May 1, 1932. It first operated as trains 1000-1001, when it ran New Orleans to San Francisco rather than only to Los Angeles. Service at first was seasonal and was on a weekly basis, then changed to twice-weekly, thrice-weekly, or weekly from time to time. Daily service began Nov. 16, 1913, and the train numbers changed to 101-102. It did not run from May 31, 1904 to Dec. 4, 1911, and service was filled in by the SUNSET EXPRESS, CALIFORNIA EXPRESS, and NEW ORLEANS EXPRESS. From Nov. 1913 to Oct. 1970 the train ran daily. In 1970 a major change came about which was the culmination of more than a decade's efforts to drop the service. The change then to thrice-weekly operation was the last alteration in the famous train until Amtrak took over running it last May 1.

It is perhaps ironic that the 2033-mile route, now bearing the no. 1 label and proving to be one of the best-patronized of the nation's long-haul routes, was omitted entirely from the route map originally proposed by the Dept. of Transportation about one year ago. Pressure from the public and their spokesmen brought about the inclusion of the Sunset Route in the system. In the first two precarious months of Amtrak operation, train revenues came close to equalling train (not including facility) operating expenses, with virtually no change in mode of operation.

Prior to Nov. 14 the train was still running tri-weekly with thru sleeping car service Los Angeles-New York in conjunction with Southern Railway's SOUTHERN CRESCENT (SR did not join Amtrak). This service was not exactly new, since thru sleepers L.A.-Washington had run until 1956. The rest of the service included baggage handling,

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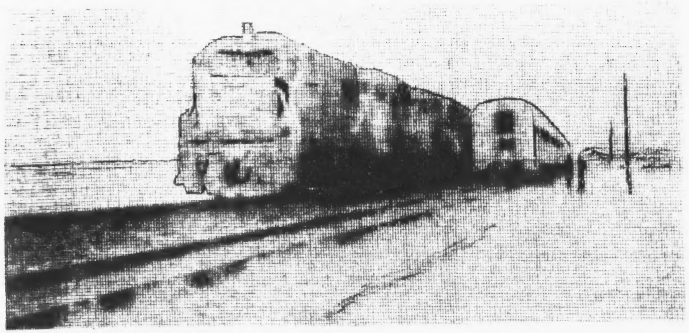

Train No. 1 waits on a siding for a freight to pass, somewhere in Arizona in 1969. Photo by Richard Tower.

sleepers and coaches L.A.-New Orleans, dining and lounge service, and automatic buffet car. Service was not nearly as luxurious as it had been a couple decades earlier, but was not as bad as the low point of the late 1960s. In order to put it in perspective, one must go back to about 1950, when rail travel was still first class.

About Aug. 20, 1950, SP introduced a whole set of new equipment built especially for the SUNSET LIMITED, introduced diesel engines, and put the train on a 42-hr schedule L.A.-N.O. The cost of this changeover was $15 million.

But thru the fifties rail travel declined, and SP made the decision to downgrade and eventually drop trains showing a deficit. At this time the train was running L.A. to N.O.--the thru service to San Francisco had been dropped Sept. 12, 1943 (the leg to S.F. went by the Coast Route after Dec. 5, 1901; previously they went by the San Joaquin Valley).

Little by little, service was cut back. In 1958 the name was changed simply to SUNSET. The original matching equipment was broken up in 1960. The hated automatic buffet cars were introduced in 1966, the year that SP began to downgrade the train in earnest. Sleepers and diner were discontinued east of El Paso, and in April 1968 sleepers were unilaterally dropped altogether and an attempt was made to eliminate all baggage handling. The diner-lounges were cut out, leaving only the automat car for food on the 2033-mile run.

The California Public Utilities Commission forced SP to run sleeper and diner within the state, and they thus ran L.A. to Yuma, Ariz. until May 23, 1968.

When the spring, 1966 downgrading occurred, the states along the route, labor unions, various cities, NARP, and other contestants asked the ICC to order the railroad to reinstate the services that had been dropped. The famous

ICC adequacies case resulted. It began June 21, 1966, and a final decision was reached Sept. 10, 1969. At the same time, SP asked the ICC (May 24, 1968) for permission to drop the train altogether. The ICC decided (Oct. 17, 1968) that the train had to run one more year. In its decision the ICC was very critical of the railroad, stating that the records did not support the claims made, and that they showed that it was SP's policy to discourage passengers.

Meanwhile in the adequacies case an ICC examiner concluded (Apr. 22, 1968) that the ICC did have the power to establish standards of passenger service. SP, the AAR, and 20 other railroads contested this conclusion, and the full ICC board heard the case. On Sept. 10, 1969 it overruled the examiner and decided it had no power to tell railroads what type of service to give. However, it recommended that Congress give it such authority. (It also ordered SP to drop its "special service charge" on the SUNSET if no special services were rendered.)

At this time the usual off-season consist of the train was like that pictured on our cover. In peak seasons were added 4 or 5 more coaches, a dormitory car, and a hamburger-grille car that ran L.A.-El Paso. SP then took a new approach, and in ICC Finance Docket 26324 in 1970 requested change to tri-weekly service if it agreed to replace diner-lounge and sleeping car service. It arranged with Southern Railway for the tri-weekly thru sleeper to New York (which actually ran from San Francisco, since cars were serviced there).

The ICC agreed to this deal, and on Oct. 2, 1970 the first tri-weekly SUNSETS simultaneously left New Orleans and L.A. The consist now was baggage, automat car, diner-lounge, coaches and one or more sleepers. This was the train and the schedule that Amtrak inherited and continued when it took over May 1, 1971.

EVERY DAY—

"SUNSET LIMITED"

No extra fare

Now that Amtrak is beginning to come into its own, making important schedule and route changes and shifting and refurbishing equipment, bigger changes in the SUNSET LIMITED will soon be seen. It is expected that newer Santa Fe equipment and Northern Pacific domes will soon appear on the train. With Amtrak's ability to make these alterations, and their potential ability to effect new efficiencies of operation, it seems hopeful that in the near future this train can be operating free of deficit, and more importantly, providing rail travel for more and more people in the Southwest.

COMMUTING AND RAPID TRANSIT

Victory for Urban Transit in Atlanta

By a narrow margin, voters in Atlanta and an adjoining county approved Nov. 9 a 1-cent sales tax increase to finance one-third of a mass rapid transit system. The Federal Government will provide the rest of the funds. Two other adjoining counties voted down the measure and will not join the system. The $1.4 billion bus-rail system is to be completed by 1980. Before then, new buses will be purchased and the present 40¢ fare reduced to 15¢.

New York Votes Against Transportation Bonds

New York state voted down the $2.5 billion (not million, as per last issue's typo) bond issue on Nov. 2, and now officials are searching for other means of saving the 30¢ New York City fare. Several plans are under consideration.

BART Has Its First Accident

Not yet carrying passengers, two prototype Bay Area Rapid Transit trains were involved in a collision Nov. 2. A test driver was operating one train under manual control at Oakland's Coliseum station early in the morning, and the train apparently could not be stopped in time to avoid striking another train in a stationary position at the elevated station. The driver was injured but not critically. No one else was in either train. The accident was later blamed on operator error, not on computer malfunction. The fiberglass cabs of the two trains were demolished, but the rest of the car bodies took the impact well. Officials said that the incident would not delay the start of BART operations, and would in fact provide valuable data about structural safety and other factors.

A Vote for Cable Cars in San Francisco

Transit played a role in still another election. San Franciscans, voting on Nov. 2, though in no mood for money expenditures, nevertheless voted to extend one of the present cable car lines in the city.

A CONTROVERSIAL busway in the median strip of the San Bernardino Freeway in L.A. is in the planning stages...

SAN FRANCISCO Muni Railway has received a $19.7 million Federal grant for 3 new cable cars, rebuilding of 7 others, and purchase of streetcar tracks and other facilities...

On Nov. 1 a small snack bar re-opened at the Los Angeles Union Station.

Random Observations from the Editor's Trip to the Midwest

CHEYENNE, WY. A 2:30pm arrival behind 3 UP yellow engines, having lost the SP gray during the night, and now we're back on the clock. The CITY disgorges passengers into this intriguing big station to buy postcards and papers. A lady is watering our cars. Engines move to the rear to pull us backwards to Denver.

BURLINGTON, IA. Awaken just in time to view this station and the Mississippi. Somehow reassuring to see that old-fashioned places like this still exist. Almost every child on the train is either crying or whimpering this morning. Probably due to the shaking over those rough BN tracks all night. The parents are likely quietly promising themselves not to do this again.

CHICAGO, IL. The rail capital of the world. Just too much for the railfan to watch at Union Station. We take a Rock Island commuter train to 10700 Seeley Avenue to confer with 20th C. Railroad Club president Bill Fahrenwald and other officers (write them for info on the club and its newsletter). The Rock Island runs slow and late on its abominable track. A few handouts headed "Your train may be late tonight" are still lying around, detailing a small derailment of RI train 12 on Oct. 19. No injuries.

ST. LOUIS, MO. A very pleasant ride from Chicago in GM20 parlor car "Springfield" on the rear of the ABE LINCOLN. Already the new Amtrak number 303 is on the Chicago trainboard. Good food, good drinks, good tape-recorded music, good track, at least to Springfield.

Leaving here on the SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS is even better. Train carries many chic young families going to various Missouri points. An ACL diner (the "Greenville") has PC menu and crew, Seaboard Airline linen, ACL and FEC silver. Diner deserved better patronage than it was getting. We pace an empty Trailways bus labelled "Denver" on a rain-slicked narrow highway with a 70mph speed limit!

KANSAS CITY, MO. Two minutes early on arrival. Most of the trains here come thru in the wee hours. The enormous depot must be the liveliest spot in town. Teeming with well-dressed people. At least 100 awaiting trains. Still more going to the Landmark restaurant at one end of the building. Others heading for the Astro theater showing X-rated films way out around track 20. Amtrak's getting lots of free advertising as all these people pass the big train boards. A traffic jam as the TEXAS CHIEF and SUPER CHIEF arrive 3 minutes apart. SUPER is 30 mins late out of Chicago. This is the place that caused Jack Newcombe in LIFE to suggest stirring up Amtrak by calling the depot daily to ask what times the trains arrive.

ALBUQUERQUE, NM. A stop to wash the SUPER's windows just as rain starts to fall. A big crowd of potential passengers, mostly Indians, swarm onto the platform and are turned away for lack of space. Don't have the full story on this yet. Are they potential revenue?

LOS ANGELES, CA. A dramatic on-time entry. The storm has swept the sky clean and rare fresh air abounds. San Gabriel Mountains are dusted with snow. A brief conference with Paul Rayton and some concern about how to eat for the next 10 hrs on the COAST DAYLIGHT. We walk to Philippe Delicatessen at 1001 N. Alameda for takeout food to survive the automat. Running low on film and can find none nearby. All Union Station concessions defunct. DAYLIGHT leaves 1 min late. Porter immediately walks thru train selling papers, a welcome little surprise. The air out the vestibule doors is fantastic along the ocean. The scenery is great, but near the cities California is the messiest of all the states we went thru.